First in flight: American Airlines is leading the airline industry on a science-based journey to net-zero emissions

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FORT WORTH, Texas — Last summer, American Airlines made a public commitment to develop a science-based, intermediate target for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions — the first airline in North America to do so.

Today, the airline is proud to share that the Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi), a coalition that defines and promotes best practices in emissions reduction targets, has approved American’s 2035 target as consistent with levels required to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. This makes American the first airline in the world with a science-based target approved by SBTi.

WHAT THIS MEANS

A science-based target is one that aligns with the level that climate scientists predict is needed to keep global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. SBTi explains it best: Science-based targets provide a clearly defined pathway for reducing GHG emissions, verifying that corporate goals align with what the latest science deems necessary for preventing the worst impacts of climate change.

The SBTi assessed the airline’s submission against a set of rigorous criteria to evaluate whether it matches up with efforts to limit global warming to well below 2°C Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. Almost 3,000 companies worldwide have committed to setting science-based targets and just more than 1,300 have targets approved by SBTi.
American's science-based target is to reduce carbon intensity, which means GHG emissions per unit of passenger and cargo payload that the airline transports, by 45% by 2035, compared to a 2019 baseline. This intermediate goal will serve as a checkpoint on the way to 2050, which is when American is aiming to be a net-zero airline.

In setting this goal, the airline is committing to reduce both direct emissions — which are primarily from the jet fuel used in flight — and the emissions from the production of the jet fuel the airline uses.

American is also committing to reduce by 40% the emissions from the production of the electricity the airline purchases (Scope 2) by 2035, also with a 2019 baseline. Scope 2 emissions are a small part of overall GHG emissions, but an important focus for reducing the impacts of global warming.

Reaching the 2035 goal will require continuous focus and concerted effort on the part of the entire airline execute on its sustainability strategy. Success will rely on a host of solutions — some that the airline controls, like fleet renewal and operational efficiency, and some it does not, like the availability of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and the development of next-generation aircraft.

Accountability is a key component. As American makes its way toward 2035, the airline will track and report progress on an annual basis in its ESG report.

American the first airline in the world with an approved science-based target, but it will not be the last. Currently, 16 airlines from across the globe — including American’s partner IAG and a couple of U.S. competitors — have also committed to set science-based targets. Despite the steep challenges all airlines face in reducing emissions in a carbon-intensive business, these commitments are a testament to the collective will of the aviation industry to create a future in which air travel’s impact on the environment is far less than it is today.

You can fly confidently when you travel with American, knowing that the airline’s commitment to sustainability is tied to ambitious goals that have been verified by experts in the field. American believes a world worth traveling is a world worth protecting, and every action it takes to become a more sustainable airline is aimed at reaching one destination: net-zero.
To learn more about the actions American is taking to reduce emissions and achieve its sustainability goals, visit aa.com/sustainability.

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